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Did Reagan go too far?

CAL THOMAS

There are those who believe President Reagan went too far when he called the Sandinista government in Nicaragua "thugs" and questioned their motives for grabbing and holding onto power.

In light of recent testimony by a Nicaraguan who fled the country for his life only to be ignored by the elite of the Washington press when he came here to tell his story, the president, in fact, may have been right on target.

Jimmy Hassan, a native Nicaraguan, was co-pastor of La Primera Iglesia Centro Americana de Managua, one of the largest Protestant congregations in the country. A lawyer, Mr. Hassan also had served as a judge in Nicaragua prior to his involvement in church work four years ago.

Mr. Hassan told a Washington news conference that despite his full-time religious work (or perhaps because of it) he was roused out of bed at 6 o'clock on the morning of Oct. 31 by officials of state security, who arrested him on charges of having "counterrevolutionary literature."

And what was this dangerous material that threatened the existence of the Sandinista regime? Was it material similar to that taught in Nicaraguan public schools, which portrays the United States as a great

enemy? Did it tell where to find arms to overthrow the government violently?

No, this "counterrevolutionary literature" consisted of nothing more than religious tracts published by Campus Crusade for Christ, an organization for which Mr. Hassan also did missionary work.

Mr. Hassan's account of his treatment reminds one of the narratives of those who survived the Soviet gulags. As a matter of fact, the Sandinistas probably learned many of their tactics from master teachers in Moscow, one of Commandante Ortega's favorite tourist stops (when he is not shopping in New York for designer glasses with his Diner's Club card).

Mr. Hassan says the state security people took him to the Campus Crusade office in Managua and ordered him to give them all his booklets, which numbered about 2,000. They then took him to the printer and confiscated 50,000 more, ordering the owner never to print them again on penalty of imprisonment.

Next stop for Mr. Hassan was the Ministry of Interior, where he says he was put in an isolation room and left alone for four hours. He was then summoned before a woman captain who, along with officers of state security, "threatened me that if anyone ever found out what they had done, 'you'll be sorry.'" They took out a pistol and held it to his head to emphasize their point.

Mr. Hassan says he was finally released at 4 p.m., but at 11 p.m. there was a knock on his door and another Interior Ministry official presented him with a citation to appear at 8 o'clock the next morning.

When he arrived at the appointed time, he was taken into a room where three lieutenants of State Security said they were first going to establish "the rules of the game."

"First," they said, "you are a dog and your life has no value to us. Any of us could kill you with pleasure. You are an enemy of the revolution."

Mr. Hassan says he was unsuccessful in attempting to persuade them that his sole activity revolved around spiritual, not political, matters.

They asked him for his "CIA director in Managua," how much the CIA paid him, what political party he was affiliated with, and why he did not make statements in favor of the Sandinista revolution.

Mr. Hassan says he rejected all of their questions and again stated his religious mandate.

What followed sounds as if it came from one of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's books. An official entered the room, held a gun to Mr. Hassan's head, cocked it, and pulled the trigger. The gun was empty. He was then transported face-down in a jeep to a state security jail where he was pushed into a tiny room ("measuring four hands by four hands") with no ventilation or light and held for four hours.

Mr. Hassan said because he had refused to cooperate they threatened to arrest his wife. They took him to a "cold room" and then back to the little room. He was shown other rooms. When one door was opened he saw a fellow staff member fully clothed. Another door was opened and a female staff member stood there nude. They began to question him again. He heard a

woman sobbing and was told it was his wife.

Mr. Hassan was eventually released. He says in conversations he has had with others who were arrested, he was treated better than the rest.

Mr. Hassan told reporters the Sandinistas were particularly upset that he and his colleagues were preaching to young people. He quoted one as saying, "You separate them from Marxism, and this we will never permit."

Mr. Hassan chronicled a number of arrests of religious leaders in recent weeks.

On Nov. 3, he said, the Sandinistas arrested the superintendent of the Assemblies of God church in Nicaragua.

On Nov. 5, they arrested the president of the Evangelical Council of Pastors and the vice superintendent of the Assemblies of God.

On Nov. 7, they arrested the president of the Pastors of Managua and one of his associates.

He said other Protestants arrested in recent weeks include the director of the Bible Society in Nicaragua, the head of Child Evangelism Fellowship, two Campus Crusade staff members, and various pastors and other religious workers.

Far from overstating the case, President Reagan was right in hauling out the tough language against the Sandinistas. Jimmy Hassan's story of his ordeal and what others are going through in Nicaragua is proof enough.

Cal Thomas is a nationally syndicated columnist.